SECONDARY SUITES

A GUIDE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This guide was designed to help local governments develop and implement secondary suite programs. The guide highlights practices intended to promote affordability, stability, and quality in the housing stock as well as provide practical information for elected officials, planners, and others.

Secondary suites are a form of rental housing that is typically affordable, ground-oriented and market-based.

Suites can provide many benefits to homeowners, tenants and the community.

For homeowners, suites can be used as mortgage helpers. This is especially beneficial in urban areas where housing costs are high. Suites also allow people to age in place, and provide a sense of security to frail seniors or persons with a disability. As well, secondary suites allow families to stay together by providing a first home for an adult child or elderly relative.

Secondary suites also provide many benefits to the tenant. Suites offer affordable rental housing that is generally ground-oriented and accessible to community amenities, such as transit, schools and shopping. In a planning sense, secondary suites create many opportunities at the community level. Suites provide low-impact densification while maintaining community character and enable families from a diversity of economic backgrounds to live in the same area. Suites also help to expand the stock of low cost rental housing without the use of government subsidies.

Although secondary suites provide tremendous benefits, the adoption of a secondary suite program does have its challenges. Introducing suites to a particular area can be met with community resistance as residents fear that suites will change the character of the neighbourhood. Issues also arise when residents feel that households with suites do not contribute fairly to utility billings or property taxes. Suite programs can also be difficult to monitor and enforce thus creating higher administrative costs and increased liability for local governments.

Although secondary suites present several challenges, many local governments throughout British Columbia have designed innovative strategies to realize a suites program. This guide presents eight case examples where local governments have implemented a secondary suite program: City of Abbotsford; City of Coquitlam; City of Kelowna; City of Nelson; City of New Westminster; City of North Vancouver; Resort Municipality of Whistler; and the Village of Anmore. Reflection on their experience provides a wealth of insights about the strengths, challenges, and transferability of different approaches.

Local governments in British Columbia use a diversity of tools when putting a suite program into practice. Strategies include;

Secondary suites are a form of rental housing that is typically affordable, ground-oriented and market-based. Suites can provide many benefits to homeowners, tenants and the community.

- designing a comprehensive public consultation and education process to increase community acceptance,
- fine tuning land use zoning protocols and planning for additional parking,
- managing liability by requiring new suites go through the standard building permit process and ensuring that all suites comply with key safety regulations by applying alternative safety standards for suites in existing dwellings.
- setting utility fee billings, and
- creating design standards and guidelines for secondary suites in new buildings.

Analysis of the eight case examples from local govts. in B.C. reveals 4 general lessons learned:

1. Consult with residents and stakeholder organizations;
2. Use a consistent approach throughout the jurisdiction;
3. Provide clear information materials;
4. Focus efforts on creation of legal suites for the future.

Implementing secondary suites will continue to be an issue for many local jurisdictions. The documented experience of those local governments in British Columbia who have developed and implemented secondary suite programs will help guide other local governments considering similar action.

The following table provides a summary of the eight sample secondary suite programs.

Jurisdiction	Pop. (approx.)	Summary of Suites Program	Results	Lessons Learned
City of Abbotsford	131,000	Suites allowed. Proactive enforcement program.	Approx 20-25% of inspected suites closed and the rest legalized. Most closed suites are multiple suites. Total of 3,400 registered suites.	Community education is key. Consistent enforcement is necessary.
City of Coquitlam	113,000	Suites allowed in all single detached homes. Alternative life safety standards for pre-2000 suites: 6'2" ceiling, alternatives to sprinklers, allowing existing heating systems. 40% utility rate.	Since 1999, when there were approx 2,372 suites, 884 were closed, 133 were legalized, and 970 were voluntarily registered (some of these were subsequently legalized). "Suite readiness" provisions were incorporated into about 80% of building permits for new homes.	Since 1999, when there were approx 2,372 suites, 884 were closed, 133 were legalized, and 970 were voluntarily registered (some of these were subsequently legalized). "Suite readiness" provisions were incorporated into about 80% of building permits for new homes.
City of Kelowna	100,000	Suites allowed in some zones. In others, owners may apply for rezoning.	As of 2004 there were approx 2,000 suites, of which approx 600 were legal (most of these were high-end).	Carriage homes are not necessarily affordable rental housing.Important to deal with design issues up front.

Jurisdiction	Pop. (approx.)	Summary of Suites Program	Results	Lessons Learned
City of Nelson	10,000	Suites allowed in all residential zones.	Information about results not available.	Take a practical approach. Acknowledge that suites add to the affordable housing stock.
City of New Westminster	55,000	Suites allowed in all detached homes. Enforcement of suites built after July 1998. Design standards and guidelines, enforced through covenants.	*Since 1998, 160 new legal suites built and approx 30 closed. In 2004 total of approx 2,500 suites.*	Incorporating design as an amenity in the zoning bylaw works well. When you legalize, you must deal with enforcement. Covenants can achieve design standards but are administratively difficult.
City of North Vancouver	44,000	Suites allowed in all detached homes, except in a basement with the floor 5' below grade. Full utility fees charged for all known suites.	As of 2004, 160 approved suites; 76 in the process of seeking approval; and approx 850-1,050 illegal suites. Almost all new, detached homes included legal suites. Although suite closures were not tracked, staff believe the City may have closed more suites than it legalized.	As of 2004, 160 approved suites; 76 in the process of seeking approval; and approx 850-1,050 illegal suites. Almost all new, detached homes included legal suites. Although suite closures were not tracked, staff believe the City may have closed more suites than it legalized.
Resort Municipality of Whistler	9,500	Allows suites in all detached homes, including in accessory buildings. Density bonus of up to 56 sq metres.	Although Whistler has not inventoried secondary suites, planning staff recall that up until the past few years there were about 75 secondary suites created per year.	Need to be active in encouraging suites. Having resort employees live in the community benefits everybody. Monitor suite creation on an ongoing basis.
Village of Anmore	1,500	Allows suites/accessory units in all detached homes.	Of approximately 90-100 secondary suites an estimated 70% are legal.	Permit suites from the outset. Address the issues of suites in duplexes.

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of this guide is to help local governments develop and implement secondary suite programs. The guide highlights secondary suite practices designed to promote affordability, stability, and quality of housing stock. It provides practical information for use by elected officials, planners, community groups, homeowners, developers, and others interested in secondary suites. The objectives are to:

1. Identify the benefits of secondary suites as a form of affordable housing, and encourage legalization of suites;
2. Identify the challenges and issues associated with secondary suites;
3. Highlight strategies local governments can use to design and implement secondary suite programs.

BACKGROUND

The provincial government has a policy vision of a thriving housing market responsive to the needs of British Columbians. This policy has two intended outcomes:

- A vibrant and thriving housing industry; and
- Housing needs met for vulnerable British Columbians.

To support this policy vision, the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services developed a Market Housing Affordability Strategy. Part of this strategy is to assist local governments to implement secondary suites programs in their communities.

A 2003 local government survey indicated that approximately half of local governments in British Columbia do not have a permissive land use policy for secondary suites.[1] This may be due in part to uncertainty about how to design a secondary suite program that meets the community's numerous objectives, such as a desire to maintain neighbourhood character while increasing density, and a desire to ensure suite safety and avoid legal liability while protecting the existing stock from closure.

Secondary suites, whether legal or not, continue to constitute a significant portion of the rental housing stock throughout British Columbia. Since most secondary suites continue to be illegal, it is difficult to track their numbers. (For purposes of this Guide, "illegal suites" refers to secondary dwelling units that are not authorized by the local government.) The Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services estimate there are between 125,000 and 150,000 illegal suites in the province.[2] The Tenants' Rights Action Coalition estimates secondary suites, both legal and illegal, account for approximately 20% of the province's rental housing supply.[3] A recent study in Prince George estimated that 16% of detached homes in that city have 'additional living quarters' and the percentage increases to 25% in the older areas.[4]

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...Secondary suites, whether legal or not, continue to constitute a significant portion of the rental housing stock throughout British Columbia.

[1] *Planning for Housing 2004: An Overview of Local Government Initiatives in British Columbia*, published by: Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, documents use of housing tools & practices by B.C. local governments

[2] *Planning for Housing 2004: An Overview of Local Government Initiatives in British Columbia*, Ministry for Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services.

[3] *Secondary Suites: A Call for Safe and Legal Housing*, Tenant's Rights Action Coalition.

[4] *Legalizing Suites, A Study for Prince George*, Prince George Housing Coalition, 2003.

SCOPE

This guide presents case studies of eight example jurisdictions with permissive secondary suite programs:[5]

- City of Abbotsford
- City of Coquitlam
- City of Kelowna
- City of Nelson
- City of New Westminster
- City of North Vancouver
- Resort Municipality of Whistler
- Village of Anmore.

These case studies illustrate the range of approaches used in BC. In addition, they offer examples of the various elements of secondary suite programs, such as public consultation, zoning, suite registration, liability management, bylaw enforcement, setting of utility fee rates, alternative building standards, design guidelines, staffing, and community education (see Part 3).

Although not covered in this guide, other jurisdictions that provide interesting examples of secondary suite programs include the following:

- The City of Surrey has a small area zoned as a Single Family Residential Secondary Suite zone and new Single Family Coach House zones;
- The City of Vancouver adopted policy in 2004 that allows suites in all areas that permit single-family dwellings;
- The District of North Vancouver used an Affordability and Choice Today (ACT) grant to develop a secondary suites program.[6]

[5] These examples were selected using the criteria outlined in Appendix A, "How We Created this Guide".
[6] *How the District of North Vancouver Built Community Acceptance for the Legalization of Secondary Suites in Single Family Neighbourhoods*, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, January 1999.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

BENEFITS OF SECONDARY SUITES

The combination of a decline in the construction of new higher density rental housing and the conversion of rental stock to strata ownership has put increased pressure on the rental market in many BC communities. With the cost of housing at record high levels, secondary suites can provide rental housing that is affordable, ground oriented, and market based. There are benefits for the owner, the tenant, and the community.

With the cost of housing at record high levels, secondary suites can provide rental housing that is affordable, ground oriented, and market based.

Benefits to the owner:

- ***Mortgage helper.*** With rising housing costs, particularly in urban areas, purchasing a house with a suite or adding a suite can make it possible for new homebuyers with limited income to purchase a home.
- ***Aging in place.*** Owners on a fixed income and frail seniors can remain in their own homes longer by renting a secondary suite. In addition, having someone living close by can provide a sense of security.
- ***Allowing families to stay together.*** An owner may provide a secondary suite as a first home for an adult child or as nearby accommodation for an elderly relative.

Benefits to the tenant:

- ***Affordable housing.*** Secondary suites expand the supply of lower cost rental housing, providing the opportunity for renters to live in a lower density residential neighbourhood.
- ***Ground-oriented housing.*** Basement units, the most common type of secondary suite, provide the greatest ease of entry and often include access to a yard.
- ***Proximity to services.*** Detached housing neighbourhoods generally have easy access to schools, shopping, recreation centres and other services.

Benefits to the community:

- ***Expansion of lower cost rental housing without the need for government subsidies.*** Municipalities frequently participate in affordable housing programs that require matching funds, land donations, or other contributions. An additional way to increase the affordable housing stock and to take some pressure off subsidized housing is to promote secondary suites as a legitimate alternative.
- ***Low-impact densification.*** Secondary suites increase the rental housing stock without significantly changing the built form of detached housing neighbourhoods. They add to the efficient use of existing housing stock, land, and municipal services; make use of underutilized infrastructure in neighbourhoods that have undergone population declines; and can help to develop more transit-supportive communities.

- ***Complete communities.*** Diversity of housing types enables citizens from a wide range of economic levels and age groups to live within the neighbourhood.
- ***Promotes Smart Development.*** Secondary suites increase density within established communities. As a result, pressure to build new developments at the community's edge is reduced. By reducing peripheral development, natural and agricultural land remains intact for recreational purposes, habitat protection, and agricultural economies.
- ***Design and character issues.*** Secondary suites allow municipalities to increase density and meet housing needs without drastically altering the character of the neighbourhood.

Benefits to the community when suites are legalized:

- ***Planning for infrastructure.*** Having more certainty about the number of dwelling units in an area allows local government to more accurately plan the development of infrastructure.
- ***Increase in federal transfer payments.*** Tenants living in legal suites may be more willing to be identified by census takers. More accurate counts can result in higher population numbers and hence increases in population-based funding.
- ***Avoiding a culture of non-compliance.*** One of the problems associated with the proliferation of illegal suites is the development of a culture of non-compliance. Conversely, a permissive policy encourages compliance.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

There is a complex set of issues and challenges associated with secondary suites.

Given the history of illegal secondary suite housing, there continues to be debate in many communities about whether to legalize.

Given the history of illegal secondary suite housing, there continues to be debate in many communities about whether to legalize. On one hand, legalizing existing suites is difficult due to factors such as health and safety concerns, neighbourhood concerns, and the need to avoid closures of affordable housing stock. On the other hand, the option of continuing to prohibit suites does not stop them from being built, thus deepening the scale of the problem.

The following are some of the key issues and challenges.

- Community acceptance. In jurisdictions where suites have always been allowed, such as the Resort Municipality of Whistler (page 26) and the Village of Anmore (page 28) community acceptance of suites is not a significant issue. Where suites have been prohibited however, many residents have developed strong opinions. Levels of community acceptance can be improved through public consultation during the development of a secondary suites program (page 9) and through community education (page 13).
- Fairness of utility billings. One of the major concerns of residents is that owners of housing with unauthorized secondary suites are 'getting a free ride.' Development of a fairly applied secondary suite program that recovers costs for

increased utilities can address this concern. See page 12 for a summary of how some jurisdictions have dealt with the issue of utility billings.

- Fairness of property taxes. Owners of homes with illegal suites may not be paying their fair share of property taxes. Examples provided by the BC Assessment Authority, based on the 2000 assessment in the Greater Victoria area, show an increase in value of 8% to 10% for homes with a 900 square foot secondary suite over similar homes with unfinished basements.
- Standards for health and safety. Construction of suites without a building permit means that the health and safety standards set out in the BC Building Code may not be met. One approach to dealing with this issue is to define alternative life safety standards for suites in existing homes, as in the case of the City of Coquitlam (page 18). Another approach is to adopt policy stating that suites built before a certain date will only be closed if there are serious safety issues, as in the case of the City of New Westminster (page 22).
- Parking. The perception that suites will create parking problems is a common source of resident concern. A typical approach to dealing with this issue is to require additional off-street parking for legal suites (pages 10-11).
- Impact on built form. Although development of suites is widely regarded as a way of increasing residential density without sacrificing the built form of neighbourhoods,the perceived impact of secondary suites on built form can be an issue. One way of managing this issue is to prohibit suites in secondary buildings or carriage houses, as is the approach of five of the eight jurisdictions profiled in this guide. Another approach is to establish secondary suite design guidelines, as in the case of the City of New Westminster (page 14).
- Bylaw enforcement. The question of whether to be reactive (responding to complaints) or proactive (seeking out illegal suites and enforcing the bylaw) is a significant issue for local government. For a brief analysis of this issue, see page 11.
- Administrative costs. For smaller jurisdictions with scarce staff resources, dealing with suites may not be a priority. Some jurisdictions may see the cost of bylaw enforcement as a stumbling block. See pages 13 and 15 for analysis of staffing costs associated with secondary suite program implementation.
- Suite registration and licensing. In some cases, the municipality seeks cost recovery through a registration fee. For example, the City of Abbotsford requires owners to pay $550 to register an existing suite and $250 to register a new suite. This helps cover costs such as inspection services to ensure the suite is compliant with health and safety requirements. As noted in Appendix B, however, requiring a license to operate a secondary suite is no longer legal (page 36).
- Local government liability. Many local governments have identified concerns about potential legal liability as a barrier to development of a secondary suite program. The concern is that non-enforcement of bylaws may leave the municipality vulnerable to lawsuits in the case of injury or death associated with unsafe suites. This guide provides a brief analysis of liability management (page 11).

- Variable definition of "single family". In the past few decades, the concept of "in-law suites" was common in many jurisdictions. However, in a landmark 1997 decision, the Supreme Court of British Columbia overturned the Municipality of Delta's policy of allowing in-law suites only. Some cultural groups tend to want extended family members living together in the same house. In some cases additional kitchen facilities may be built for this purpose, technically creating a suite. The City of North Vancouver, highlighted in Part 3 of this Guide, is an example of where this has become an issue.
- Security of tenure. The possibility that an illegal suite could be closed can be a threat to security of tenure. Both property owners and tenants of illegal suites may be reluctant to use the Residential Tenancy Act to deal with tenancy disputes.

ELEMENTS OF SECONDARY SUITE PROGRAMS

Shifting from a restrictive to a permissive policy on suites creates more certainty and fairness for residents, tenants and owners. However, it also has costs and budget implications for local government. Developing and implementing a secondary suite program has several elements, each of which may be challenging.

This section provides analysis of the following program elements, drawing on the eight case examples presented in Part 5:

- Public consultation and community acceptance strategies
- Zoning (including parking provisions)
- Liability management
- Bylaw enforcement
- Utility fees
- Building standards
- Design guidelines
- Staffing
- Community education.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE

Consulting with residents and stakeholders is an important part of developing a secondary suite program. With the possible exception of newly incorporated municipalities, residents tend to have strong opinions on the question of whether suites should be allowed in detached housing, and under what conditions.

Consulting with residents and stakeholders is an important part of developing a secondary suite program.

The experience of the City of North Vancouver (see Part 4 of this guide) illustrates how community consultation can identify and address concerns. Consultation methods used by one or more of the eight jurisdictions profiled in this guide include the following:

- Public meetings, public hearings, and other consultation events;
- Community surveys;
- Focus groups;
- Multi-stakeholder advisory committees and task forces;
- Special meetings of a committee of Council (e.g. Housing Committee);
- Community input gathered as part of consultant studies;
- Community feedback gathered as part of staff-led policy reviews.

ZONING

Land use zoning is the primary tool used by local governments to specify whether secondary suites are allowed in detached dwellings, how many are allowed per property, what is the acceptable size range, etc. Zoning may be applied to all detached dwelling

units in a jurisdiction, to specific geographic areas, or to specific properties rezoned on an ad hoc basis. Based on analysis of the eight jurisdictions profiled in this guide, the bylaw provisions for secondary suites typically deal with the following matters.

A common approach is to allow secondary suites throughout single-family zones and in single-family dwellings located in multi-family zones.

Where Suites are Allowed. A common approach is to allow secondary suites throughout single-family zones and in single-family dwellings located in multi-family zones. A variation is allowing suites in all single-family areas except in a certain neighbourhood or area (e.g. Resort Municipality of Whistler, City of Port Coquitlam).

In some cases (e.g. City of Kelowna and City of Surrey) a special zone is created for suites and rezoning of individual properties is required.

How Many Suites are Allowed. Municipalities typically use zoning bylaws to confirm the BC Building Code limitation that a maximum of one secondary suite is allowed per dwelling unit or property.

Whether Suites are Allowed in Accessory Buildings. Zoning may specify whether secondary suites must be contained within the principal dwelling or may be contained in an accessory building such as a carriage house or garage. For example, the City of North Vancouver zoning specifies that suites must be "located in the principal structure on the site." In the case of jurisdictions such as the City of Kelowna, the Resort Municipality of Whistler, and the Village of Anmore, suites may be located in a separate building.

Suite Size and Number of Rooms. Zoning typically uses the floor space maximum specified in the BC Building Code definition of a secondary suite: 90 square metres, occupying not more than 40% of the habitable floor space of the building.

Some jurisdictions use zoning bylaws to specify minimum suite size. For example, the City of North Vancouver requires that suites have a minimum floor space of 400 square feet (38 square metres) and the Resort Municipality of Whistler requires a minimum of 32.5 square metres.

Some jurisdictions specify the number of bedrooms and/or number of other rooms permitted. For example, Whistler allows up to two bedrooms, two bathrooms, one living room, and one kitchen.

Except in semi-rural or low-density jurisdictions, parking is one of the common issues perceived to be a problem with secondary suites.

Parking Provisions. Except in semi-rural or low-density jurisdictions, parking is one of the common issues perceived to be a problem with secondary suites. For example, a public controversy over suites in Surrey highlighted resident concerns about perceived parking problems associated with illegal suites. In Coquitlam a 1997 public opinion poll found that over 90% of respondents favouring secondary suite legalization indicated that provision of adequate parking should be a condition for legalization.

Zoning bylaws typically require one additional off-street parking space for a secondary suite. In some cases, the bylaw specifies that this space be independently accessible (i.e., the space has direct access to the street and is not blocked by another parking space).

In the case of the City of Nelson, the number of bedrooms determines the number of additional parking spaces required (one parking space is required for suites with up to two bedrooms).

Owner Occupancy. In several jurisdictions (e.g., City of Abbotsford, City of North Vancouver) the bylaw states that dwellings with secondary suites must be occupied by the owner. However, an owner occupancy requirement is legally challengeable, and the enforcement of this requirement is problematic.

Other Zoning Requirements. Zoning bylaws may specify requirements that reflect the particular situation and objectives of the jurisdiction. For example, the Resort Municipality of Whistler specifically prohibits use of secondary suites as tourist accommodations.

LIABILITY MANAGEMENT

The question of local government liability in connection with secondary suites is a continued source of confusion. A widespread concern is that "turning a blind eye" to illegal suites may expose municipalities to liability issues. In the eight jurisdictions profiled in this guide, even for those that collect utility fees from illegal suites (e.g. the City of Nelson and City of Coquitlam), liability is not regarded as a significant problem. The typical strategy is to require that new suites go through the standard building permit process and to require that suite upgrading involving a building permit comply with the key health and safety standards as described in the BC Building Code.

The question of local government liability in connection with secondary suites is a continued source of confusion. A widespread concern is that "turning a blind eye" to illegal suites may expose municipalities to liability issues.

Some jurisdictions manage liability by requiring covenants on land titles. For example, the City of New Westminster bylaw specifies that owners register a covenant incorporating all of the secondary suite requirements and indemnifying against liability in favour of the City. According to legal opinion presented in the Barriers and Solutions workshop proceedings, existing legal precedents suggest that local government would not be liable for adopting a non-enforcement policy:

> *The existing case law suggests that local governments would not be found negligent for losses that occur as a result of local government policy. Therefore, if a local council determines that having affordable housing is more important than ensuring that Building Code standards are enforced and adopts a policy of not conducting inspections of secondary suites, they should not be liable for any claims that may arise as a result of their non-enforcement policy.*[7]

[7] Barriers and Solutions, A Secondary Suites Workshop, Summary of Proceedings, Smart Growth BC, April 2003 (pp. 12-12).

BYLAW ENFORCEMENT

While not ideal, a common approach to enforcement of bylaws pertaining to secondary suites is to act on a complaints basis. This approach reflects staffing limitations and the desire to avoid loss of affordable rental housing stock due to closures of existing suites. In some cases (e.g., City of New Westminster) enforcement of suites built prior to a certain date focuses primarily on health and safety issues.

Decommissioning or closure of suites typically involves removal of cooking facilities and associated wiring. In some jurisdictions it also involves removal of permanent barriers separating the unit from the rest of the building.

In jurisdictions such as the City of Abbotsford and the City of Nelson, staff members proactively enforce the bylaw. The cost of this effort may be offset by additional utility fee revenues collected for non-registered suites.

UTILITY FEES

As shown in the following table, the eight examples profiled in this guide illustrate the variety of approaches to secondary suite utility fee billings. In some cases (e.g., City of Coquitlam) the municipality uses a higher utility billing rate for unregistered suites, which may be an incentive to legalize them.

Jurisdiction	Utility fees for registered suites (per year)	Utility fees for known but unregistered suites
City of Abbotsford	$250	n/a
City of Coquitlam	$171 (40% of full rate)	$427 (full rate)
City of Kelowna	Garbage 100%; water metered	n/a
City of Nelson	100% (of full rate)	100% (of full rate)
City of New Westminster	50% (of full rate)	50% (of full rate)
City of North Vancouver	100% (of full rate)	100% (of full rate)
Resort Municipality. of Whistler	0% (no utility fees for suites)	n/a
Village of Anmore	Recycling 100%; water metered	n/a

HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS IN THE BC BUILDING CODE

The BC Building Code was amended in 1995 to include specific provisions for secondary suites. These amendments reduced requirements for things such as ceiling heights, fire safety provisions, and sound controls. (For more information, see Appendix B, "Existing Local Government Powers for Regulating Secondary Suites"). The Code however, does not apply to existing suites in existing buildings, except when there is a building permit for renovations or upgrading.

The BC Building Code was amended in 1995 to include specific provisions for secondary suites.

Some municipalities have opted to establish their own framework of requirements for suites that never received a permit. For example, the City of Coquitlam developed building standards, known as "alternate life safety standards", for secondary suites in houses that were built or had a building permit issued before July 1, 2000. Under these standards, ceilings may be as low as 1.88 metres or 6'2" rather than 2 metres or 6'7" as specified in the Code.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Municipalities do not typically have design guidelines specific to secondary suites. Recent experience in jurisdictions such as Kelowna, however, suggests that community concerns about the visual impact of secondary suites can become serious.

The City of New Westminster created "Design Standards and Guidelines" for new secondary suites in new buildings. The guidelines set out mandatory requirements, flexible design standards, using a point system, and recommended guidelines. The document includes illustrations for landscaping and private outdoor space with separate sections for suites below or above grade level, parking, suite entries, and suite liveability.

STAFFING

Developing and implementing a secondary suite program can be costly, particularly in terms of staff time. The eight case examples profiled here illustrate several options for staffing secondary suite programs, ranging from having no designated program staffing to having a Secondary Suites Coordinator.

1. Designated staff (e.g., City of New Westminster Secondary Suites Coordinator);
2. Expanded bylaw enforcement staff (e.g., City of Kelowna – additional Bylaw Enforcement Officer);
3. Temporary addition of staff (e.g., City of Coquitlam six-week operation of information call centre);
4. Existing, ongoing staff (e.g. Resort Municipality of Whistler, City of Nelson, City of North Vancouver).

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Providing information about secondary suite policy and program implementation is necessary so that homeowners, tenants and other stakeholders have opportunities to become aware of what the rules are and how they are being enforced. Community education is particularly important during initial program implementation and when changes are happening. A common tool is an information sheet that explains the substance of the secondary suite rules in plain language (e.g., City of Nelson). In cases where a significant program change is occurring, a proactive education effort may be necessary. When the City of Coquitlam began billing owners for additional utility charges it mailed an update and Q&A sheet to all homeowners with suites.

Providing information about secondary suite policy and program implementation is necessary so that homeowners, tenants and other stakeholders have opportunities to become aware of what the rules are and how they are being enforced.

Increasingly, local governments are providing information on secondary suites via their web sites. The City of Coquitlam site illustrates the range of materials that can be provided, from general information to a detailed Secondary Suites Guide downloadable in PDF:

http://www.coquitlam.ca/Residents/My+Property/Secondary+Suites/default.html

In the case of the City of New Westminster, community education materials include sets of design guidelines for existing and new suites:

http://www.city.new-westminster.bc.ca/cityhall/planning/06publications/secondary_suites.html

CASE EXAMPLES

This section provides eight case examples of jurisdictions with permissive secondary suite programs. The following table summarizes these programs and the staff resources used in program implementation.

Jurisdiction	Population (approx.)	Summary of secondary suites program	Staff resources for implementation
City of Abbotsford	131,000	Suites allowed. Proactive enforcement program.	Was approx 50% of a full-time equivalent (FTE) Bylaw Enforcement; approx. 20% FTE.
City of Coquitlam	113,000	Suites allowed in all single detached homes. Alternative life safety standards for pre-2000 suites: 6'2" ceiling, alternatives to sprinklers, allowing existing heating systems. 40% utility rate.	Operated a information call centre for 6 weeks and additional Building Inspector for 6 months. Ongoing implementation by regular staff.
City of Kelowna	100,000	Suites, including carriage houses, allowed in some zones. In other zones owners may apply for rezoning.	Program justified hiring an additional Bylaw Enforcement Officer.
City of Nelson	100,000	Suites, including carriage houses, allowed in some zones. In other zones owners may apply for rezoning.	Ongoing implementation by regular staff.
City of New Westminster	55,000	Suites allowed in all detached homes. Enforcement of suites built after July 1998. Design standards and guidelines, enforced through covenants.	Secondary Suites Coordinator and 2 part time planning clerks.
City of North Vancouver	44,000	Suites allowed in all detached homes, except in a basement with the floor over 5' below grade. To legalize, owners must meet Building Code standards. Full utility fees charged for all known suites.	Approx. 70% FTE of a Bylaw Enforcement Officer time. Building, electrical and plumbing inspectors provide orientation to owners applying for legalization.
Resort Municipality of Whistler	9,500	Allows suites in all detached homes, including in accessory buildings. Density bonus of up to 56 square metres for inclusion of a suite with protected rent.	Ongoing implementation by regular staff. Proactive bylaw enforcement to prevent tourist use of suites.
Village of Anmore	1,500	Allows suites in all detached homes, including units in accessory buildings.	Ongoing implementation by regular staff.

These examples illustrate the unique approaches used in various jurisdictions. Reflection on the experience of these eight provides a wealth of insights about the strengths, challenges, and transferability of different approaches.

CITY OF ABBOTSFORD

LOCAL CONTEXT

With an estimated population of 131,000, Abbotsford is a rapidly growing community. It faces a serious housing affordability challenge, although this is less of an issue than in Lower Mainland communities that are closer to Vancouver. The population of Abbotsford's urban core area, which is the primary town centre in the Fraser Valley region, is approximately 105,000.

MUNICIPAL RESPONSE

The City of Abbotsford allows one secondary suite per owner-occupied home, up to 90 square metres or 40% of the net floor area. Suites are permitted in all single dwelling unit zones except RS5 (one unit compact lot residential zone), RS6 (one unit varied lot size residential zone) and RS7 (mixed residential zone). At least one additional off-street parking space must be provided. Abbotsford has a proactive program to seek out illegal suites. A bylaw enforcement officer checks newspapers for rentals and drives through neighbourhoods to look for signs of secondary suites, and then checks to see whether they are registered. If not, a bylaw enforcement officer contacts the owner to make them aware that they have to register the suite. If a suite is discovered, the owner has two choices – either register the suite or remove it.

Abbotsford has a proactive program to seek out illegal suites. A bylaw enforcement officer checks newspapers for rentals and drives through neighbourhoods to look for signs of secondary suites, and then checks to see whether they are registered.

To register an existing suite owners pay $550. An inspector comes out to ensure major code items are dealt with. Fire separation is the primary concern. To decommission a suite the city charges a $60 fee. A qualified electrician is required to disconnect the 220 outlet and cover it over with metal. Inspection must also confirm removal of the stove and range hood and any barriers between the suite and the rest of the home.

A new suite in a new or existing home costs $250 to register and is required to be built to code. Owners with secondary suites pay an extra $250 per year for utilities.

RESULTS

According to City staff, the program works well. There has been extensive public education, and owners have learned what the requirements are. Approximately 20 to 25% of inspected suites are closed and the rest are legalized. Most of the closed suites are multiple suites in a detached home.

With approximately 35,000 single-family dwellings, Abbotsford has more than 3,400 registered secondary suites.[8]

[8] City of Abbotsford, "2004 Development Services Statistical Report."

LESSONS LEARNED

1. ***Community education is key.*** The program is effective because there has been a good community education program and people know what to expect.
2. ***Consistent enforcement is necessary.*** Enforcement is felt to be an important part of demonstrating fairness. In Abbotsford it takes about one day per week of bylaw enforcement time to implement the proactive secondary suite program.

TRANSFERABILITY

The City of Abbotsford is an example of a successful secondary suite program that is permissive while also proactive on enforcement. The experience of Abbotsford is relevant to other mid-size and larger jurisdictions facing rapid single-family residential development.

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CITY OF COQUITLAM

LOCAL CONTEXT

Coquitlam is a rapidly growing suburban municipality. The population more than doubled over 25 years, from 55,000 in 1976 to 113,000 in 2001.

MUNICIPAL RESPONSE

The City of Coquitlam undertook a comprehensive strategy on secondary suites starting in 1997. The city hired planning consultants, appointed a Community Advisory Committee, conducted a public survey, developed policy options, held public open houses, and made recommendations. A zoning bylaw, passed in 1999, permits secondary suites in all single-family zones and in single-family homes in the RT-1 two-family zone.

The City of Coquitlam has a well-established secondary suite program, including the following elements:

- An extensive array of public information materials (web site, guide, and video).
- A set of building code equivalencies, "alternate life safety standards" for

secondary suites in place for houses that were built or had a building permit issued before July 1, 2000. This is intended to reduce the cost of legalizing existing suites;
- Charging 40% of the per-household utility rate for legal suites or 100% for suites that are not legalized or decommissioned;
- Waiving the standard utility charge for secondary suites for a grace period of 1 year;
- Recognition of secondary suites in the Official Community Plan (Part 2, Subsection 4.1) and zoning bylaws.

The city defines a secondary suite as "an additional dwelling unit contained within a building of residential occupancy containing only one other dwelling unit".
The steps for legalizing existing suites and for establishing new legal suites in existing homes are as follows:

1. Optional construction assessment at a cost of $109.00;
2. Apply for permits;
3. Do necessary construction to Building Code if house was built after 2000 or to alternate life safety standards if built before 2000;
4. When the suite has passed the inspections, it is legal.

The requirements for decommissioning suites are to remove cooking facilities, remove plumbing fixtures, or create a permanent opening to the suite.
For new suites, the requirements are as follows:

- Not subdividable from the main unit;
- One on-site parking space in addition to the 2 spaces required for main dwelling unit;
- Maximum size is lesser of 90 square metres or 40% of the total floor area;
- Compliance with the BC Building Code;
- In the case of on-site sewerage, confirmation in writing from the licensing agency that the system will not be compromised.

The Coquitlam secondary suites program is now implemented by regular staffing. However, the city did have five people staff a call centre for six weeks in 2000 and had one additional building inspector for six months. In the future the City will likely hire additional people for enforcement for a limited period. The City of Coquitlam has addressed liability issues through the requirement to meet the BC Building Code or equivalencies for a lower ceiling height of 6'2", alternatives to sprinklers, and allowing existing heating systems. When the city becomes aware of an unauthorized suite, it notifies the owner that the 100% increase in the utility charge applied can be lowered to 40% if the suite is legalized.

RESULTS

There were an estimated 2,372 suites in 1999 when the program began. As of 2004, 884 suites were decommissioned, 133 were legalized, and 970 were voluntarily

registered, some of these were subsequently legalized. In addition, "suite readiness" provisions were incorporated into about 80% of building permits for new homes. As of April 2004, there were 171 current building permit applications for secondary suites.

LESSONS LEARNED

Strengths of the City of Coquitlam program include the following:

- Thorough public process;
- Equitable application of bylaw provisions;
- No penalties for people who come forward – e.g., no inspection fees;
- Establishment and application of building standards for existing suites;
- The "suite readiness" program for new construction is receiving a good response;
- Gradual implementation, with relevant information provided to the public.

Challenges include the following:

- Cost to legalize, although alternative standards have reduced costs somewhat;
- Uptake on legalizing existing suites has been slow;
- Owners who have a suite but demonstrate no intention of using it, have to decommission the suite.

Lessons learned through the City of Coquitlam experience are as follows:

1. Work to reduce the complexity of regulation;
2. Building Code equivalencies can reduce the cost of legalizing by up to 60%;
3. Encourage new homes to be built as suite ready;
4. Involve the community early and address their priorities;
5. Have an ongoing public education program.

TRANSFERABILITY

The Coquitlam experience is relevant to mid-sized and larger jurisdictions experiencing rapid growth of single-family housing and facing rental housing affordability challenges. The city is a good example of how public consultation and education can be integral elements of a secondary suite program.

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CITY OF KELOWNA

LOCAL CONTEXT

With a population of approximately 100,000, Kelowna is the largest urban centre in the Okanagan. It is considered a highly liveable community and is known as a retirement centre.

MUNICIPAL RESPONSE

Secondary suites have been permitted in Kelowna for many years. Secondary suite zoning was carried forward from pre-incorporation. Large portions of the older neighbourhoods were included.

> *In 1998 the potential for legal secondary suites was increased by inclusion of an "s" zone. Owners in the majority of zones could apply for rezoning. These rezoning applications take less time, bypassing the Area Planning Commission and go straight to Council. At $585, the fees are about 1/3 less than other rezoning fees.*

Kelowna identifies illegal suites by comparing licensed or zoned suites with BC Assessment data. In cases where there are discrepancies, staff investigates.

Council's intent to protect and expand the stock of secondary suites is reflected in an objective stated in the Official Community Plan: (Housing Policies 8.1.46): "*Encourage, under the conditions stipulated in the Zoning Bylaw, the creation of secondary suites*".

The City of Kelowna defines a secondary suite as: "A secondary or accessory use where the main building is a single detached dwelling." Requirements for legal secondary suites are:

- Must be in a single detached home or accessory building;
- No structural alterations or additions to alter the residential character;
- One secondary suite per principal dwelling unit;
- Connection to a community sewer unless lot is at least 830 square metres and meets the City and Medical Health Officer requirements for septic disposal capacity;
- Maximum floor area not to exceed the lesser of 90 square metres or 40% of the total floor area of the principal building. In an accessory building, the maximum floor area is the lesser of 90 square metres or 75% of the total floor area of the principal building;
- Comply with all city bylaws and the Building Code;
- No strata titling;
- One additional parking space.

The city completed numerous reports on secondary suites, organized public consultation events, and held meetings with its Housing Committee. These activities

resulted in zoning changes, information brochures and increased enforcement.

The enforcement process resulted in another bylaw enforcement officer being hired. (Bylaw enforcement has approximately 300 secondary suite files open at any time.)

Water usage is metered, and garbage cost is based on two households.

RESULTS

The City of Kelowna estimated that as of 2004, there were about 2,000 suites, of which approximately 600 were legal. Rental rates have gone up due to the market and the growing numbers of high-end carriage house suites.

LESSONS LEARNED

City of Kelowna planners identify the flexibility of the suites program as a key strength.

One of the key challenges encountered by the city has been establishing a secondary suite development permit process and design guidelines. The City has received increased numbers of complaints about the appearance of carriage houses.

One of the key challenges encountered by the city has been establishing a secondary suite development permit process and design guidelines.

Lessons learned through Kelowna's experience are as follows:

- Carriage homes are not necessarily affordable rental housing. In some cases the accessory suite carriage house rents for more than the main dwelling.
- It is important to deal with design issues up front. The visual impact of carriage house development has been a factor in negative reaction to the secondary suite program and a push to down zone in some areas.

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CITY OF NELSON

LOCAL CONTEXT

Nelson has a population of approximately 10,000 with geographic constraints limiting new housing development. Nelson has low rental housing vacancy rates. It is a college

town, which creates additional demand for affordable rental housing. Secondary suites comprise much of the lower cost rental housing.

MUNICIPAL RESPONSE

The City of Nelson established a secondary suite program in 1987. Nelson allows secondary suites in all residential zones except in the case of mobile homes and in zones with smaller than the minimum lot size. Secondary suite floor area may be up to 90 square metres or 40% of the habitable building. A suite requires one additional parking unit if it has two bedrooms or less.

Nelson's policy is to encourage safe secondary suites that pay their own way. Where suites exist and are known, the city assesses an additional 100% of sewer and water charges. Building inspectors use various methods to proactively identify unregistered suites, for example, by reviewing rental ads and BC Assessment data. If owners claim the suite is not being used, they are required to remove the kitchen facilities and sign a waiver. Nelson uses a practical approach to decommissioning rather than having set requirements.

RESULTS

Information was not available regarding the impact of the City of Nelson's secondary suite program.

LESSONS LEARNED

Asked about lessons learned, city staff commented as follows: "Suites are there and will always be there as long as people are moving to the community and cannot afford the alternatives. We take a practical approach. We acknowledge the reality that secondary suites are out there and that they add to the housing stock."

TRANSFERABILITY

The City of Nelson's experience with secondary suites and lessons learned are relevant for other small urban jurisdictions with limited availability of affordable rental housing. By legalizing suites, the Nelson approach acknowledges the importance of this form of housing stock while also enabling the city to collect additional utility fees.

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CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER

LOCAL CONTEXT.

With a population of approximately 55,000 at the 2001 census, New Westminster has grown at a steady pace. New Westminster has the lowest rental rates in Greater Vancouver, and a significant portion of the rental housing stock is comprised of secondary suites.

MUNICIPAL RESPONSE

The City of New Westminster's suite program was born out of work on an Affordable Housing Strategy. As a result, Council had some degree of confidence that secondary suites were part of the larger affordable housing picture.

Between 1994 and 1998 the City of New Westminster carried out extensive consultation and education activities. Formation of a Secondary Suites Committee provided a vehicle for advice and community engagement. A community survey was done as part of the consultation as well as focus groups and frequent interaction with councillors. Some local groups were concerned about the safety of illegal suites. The prevailing view was that the need for affordable rental housing needs to be balanced with the protection of the health and safety of the community.

New Westminster allows one suite per property in areas zoned for single detached dwellings or in single detached homes in two-family dwelling zones.
Requirements for legal suites are as follows:

- Conform to City of New Westminster "Design Standards and Guidelines for Houses with Secondary Suites";
- Comply with the City's Building Bylaw and the Building Department's Technical Requirements for Secondary Suites;
- Be no smaller than 350 sq. ft. or no larger than 968 sq. ft. or 40% of the total floor space of the house (whichever is smaller) BC Building Code;
- No habitable space constructed below flood construction level (an issue in the Queensborough neighbourhood, the entiretyof which is in a flood plain);
- Cannot be stratified, subdivided or otherwise legally separated from the main dwelling unit;
- One off-street parking space (in addition to the one space required for the principal unit.);
- One secondary suite per single detached dwelling;
- Covenant incorporating all the requirements and indemnifying against liability in favour of the City must be registered on title;

New Westminster uses the following definition: "A secondary suite is a dwelling unit that is an accessory to a single detached dwelling and is comprised of one or more habitable rooms and intended for use as a separate and independent residence. A secondary suite contains sleeping facilities, a bathroom and cooking facilities that are for the exclusive use of the occupant(s) of the suite."

To be legal, New Westminster requires suites comply with the Building Code and the city's "Technical Requirements for Secondary Suites". The legalization process involves obtaining a building permit. Before receiving authorization the owner must register a covenant on title.

For suites created before July 1998, there is only enforcement of serious health and safety issues and neighbourhood impact on a complaints basis or if they come to the attention of the city because of criminal activity e.g., marijuana grow-ops.

Suites discovered to have been created without permits after July 6, 1998, must be removed or legalized. To remove a suite, the owner must hire a registered electrical contractor to remove the stove plug, breaker, and fan hood. The contractor must report completion of this work to the provincial electrical inspector.

New Westminster charges a flat rate for water, sewer, garbage and recycling. An additional 50% utility fee is charged to owners of all known suites, whether legal or not. It is the city's understanding that charging for a service does not put the city in a position of tacitly approving suites. If a suite is not occupied as a separate and independent dwelling unit, which usually means it is not rented, the property is eligible to be exempted from the utility charge, subject to an inspection and signing of an affidavit. A secondary suites coordinator and two part time planning clerks implement the City of New Westminster program.

RESULTS

New Westminster's secondary suite program began in 1998. Since then, 160 new legal suites have been built and about 30 suites have been decommissioned. In 2004 approximately 2500 suites, both legal and unauthorized, were documented. The program has resulted in increased safety and quality in new legal suites and elimination of some of the more problematic existing suites.

LESSONS LEARNED

Strengths of New Westminster's program include the following:

- Secondary suites are allowed throughout the city, and the policy is perceived to be fairly applied;
- The program is forward looking, aiming to build up the stock of new legal suites that are safe.

Challenges include:

- There is no incentive to legalize existing suites in existing houses;
- Meeting the flexible standards at times can be onerous due to the age of much of New Westminster's housing stock – ceiling height and existing heating systems are the most difficult to address. Many older suites in Queensborough cannot be legalized because they are in the flood plain.

Asked about lessons learned that would be of interest to other jurisdictions in implementing the City of New Westminster's approach, staff identified the following:

1. ***Incorporating design as an amenity in the zoning bylaw works well*** – "secondary suite design amenity." New Westminster has extensive design standards and guidelines for secondary suites.
2. ***When you legalize, you must deal with enforcement.*** For pre-existing suites, the city responds to complaints only. Owners and developers continue to try to create suites without permits. Council support for enforcement is important.
3. ***Covenants can achieve design standards but are administratively difficult.***

TRANSFERABILITY

The City of New Westminster example is applicable to other mid-sized jurisdictions that have identified secondary suites as an important form of affordable rental housing. The use of design standards and covenants may be of interest to municipalities concerned about the design and character of neighbourhoods.

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CITY OF NORTH VANCOUVER

LOCAL CONTEXT

With a population of over 44,000, the City of North Vancouver is relatively dense. It has a higher incidence of low-income households than regional or provincial averages. With a generally expensive housing market, access to affordable rental housing has been a significant issue.

MUNICIPAL RESPONSE

The City of North Vancouver legalized secondary suites in 1993. In 1995, it permitted secondary suites in all single-family zones and in single-family buildings in any zone. The city has done extensive community consultation on secondary suites, initially as part of a secondary suites study it commissioned in 1989. Residents were adamant that only owner-occupied homes have suites. Although this is not enforceable, having this requirement in the bylaw was crucial to gaining initial resident support. In 1990 Council formed a Secondary Suites Advisory Committee. A policy review undertaken in 2004 will invite input from the public and interested organizations.

Council supported secondary suites as a major source of affordable rental housing through the following actions:

- In 1999 Council endorsed the recommendation of the Affordable Housing Task Force that staff "review existing policy and procedures and how they impact on the retention, rehabilitation and replacement of the existing affordable housing stock, including secondary suites, with a view to maximizing the potential retention and rehabilitation of the older, more affordable market rental housing stock".
- In 2002 Council adopted a new Official Community Plan with residential land use objectives "to maintain the city's single-family neighbourhoods, while allowing for accessory uses such as home based businesses and secondary suites."
- In 2004 the policy committee of Council requested staff look at ways to simplify the process of legalizing secondary suites

The City defines a secondary suite as "a separate designated area within a one-family residential dwelling, containing toilet, bathroom, sleeping and living areas and cooking facilities." Requirements are:

- Minimum size of 400 square feet (38 square metres) and a maximum of 40% of the total floor area of the building, up to 969 square feet (90 square metres);
- Only in single family dwelling, not in duplexes or multi-family residential;
- Only allowed where the owner lives in the building;[9]
- Must be located in the principal structure on the site. Suites are not allowed in accessory buildings such as garages;
- Only one suite per single family dwelling;
- May not be stratified;
- One additional parking space capable of independently exiting the property;
- Not permitted in a basement if the floor level of that basement is more than 5 feet below average grade.

To legalize existing suites, owners are required to meet BC Building Code standards. New suites, in existing or new homes, require a building permit.

[9] As noted previously in this guide, requiring owner occupancy is legally challengeable.

Decommissioning existing suites previously required the owner to remove the kitchen. Council has provided for a single family dwelling to have a second cooking facility without the other requirements for a secondary suite. This was recognition of certain cultural requirements. Council directed staff to enforce only if there are life-threatening safety issues.

The utility fee is doubled for any known suites, whether legal or unauthorized.

A building inspector, electrical inspector, and a plumbing inspector attend an orientation session with an owner who is legalizing a suite in order to provide a list of deficiencies. Two bylaw enforcement officers spend approximately 30-40% of their time on the secondary suite program. If resources were available, 100% of their time could be used.

RESULTS

As of 2004, North Vancouver had: 160 approved secondary suites, mostly in existing homes; 76 suites in the process of seeking approval; and approximately 850-1,050 illegal suites. Almost all new, detached homes included legal suites. Although suite closures were not tracked, staff believe the city may have closed more suites than it legalized.

LESSONS LEARNED

The primary strength of the City of North Vancouver program is that it is citywide with secondary suites permitted in any single family home in any zone. Another strength is the manner in which the legalization process was implemented. It was firm, but fair. The approach is to work with property owners to bring their suites up to code.

The primary challenge is that, because of the cost and trouble to bring a suite up to code, owners do not typically legalize unless they are identified.

City of North Vancouver staff offer the following advice to other jurisdictions interested in implementing their approach:

- Create a blanket zone for all detached housing, not certain areas or spot rezoning;
- Look for ways to reward rather than penalize owners for legalizing. For example, the municipality could give a break on property taxes for a period of time, as is done for heritage preservation and could give a break on utility charges or charge more for known illegal suites than for legal suites;
- Legalize for the future - it sets a new standard for secondary suites;
- Start with a community-based process. Include people who are for, against, and neutral and come up with something they can all accept.

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TRANSFERABILITY

The City of North Vancouver experience and lessons learned are relevant to other smaller and mid-sized urban jurisdictions.

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RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER

LOCAL CONTEXT

With a population of approximately 10,000, Whistler is a rapidly growing resort community that has one of the most expensive housing markets in Canada. Access to rental housing that is affordable for resort and hospitality sector employees is an ongoing challenge.

MUNICIPAL RESPONSE

The Resort Municipality of Whistler has allowed secondary suites in all detached dwellings since it incorporated, except in one part of the community that is not connected to the sewer system. It defines a secondary suite as an "*auxiliary residential dwelling unit*". Initially it had to be in the same building as the principal dwelling, but this requirement was relaxed to allow for a suite in an auxiliary building.

Until the mid-1990s, when there was a shift toward construction of high-end vacation homes, inclusion of a secondary suite in detached homes was typical. In 1997, the Whistler Housing Authority was incorporated as a vehicle for implementation of an employee housing program. This program uses development surcharges to create rental housing units that have controlled rental rates and are restricted to resort employees. Whistler specifies the following requirements for legal secondary suites:

- A gross floor area no greater than 90 square metres & no less than 32.5 square metres;
- Up to 40% of the gross floor area on a parcel;
- Up to two bedrooms, two bathrooms, one living room, and one kitchen;
- Shall not be used for tourist accommodation.

In 2003, to provide an incentive for development of secondary suites, Whistler introduced a density bonus of up to 56 square metres for inclusion of a suite with protected rent. This was in response to declining production of suites and a shift toward construction of luxury homes whose owners may not need a 'mortgage helper'. As stated in the bylaw:

> *"An additional 56 square metres of gross floor area may be added to a dwelling unit or an auxiliary building for employee use and rental, provided that the floor space ratio on a parcel does not exceed .35. This bonus density is subject to the owner entering into an employee housing agreement with the Municipality for the auxiliary residential dwelling unit, the terms of which shall be the Municipality's standard charge terms for employee housing covenants..."*

In new developments, a certain percentage of detached homes (e.g. 50%) are required to have secondary suites. These properties must have covenants, requiring that the tenants be employees. However, this system has proven difficult to enforce. In some cases the suites are created, in accordance with the requirement, but not rented. With the price of typical detached housing being in the $1 million to $1.5 million range, $800 per month in rental income may be relatively insignificant. Owners with suites pay no additional utility charges.

Consultation activities included the work of a Non-Cost Housing Initiatives Task Force convened by Council in 2002. Public input was used in developing recommendations for encouraging secondary suites. Staffing for the secondary suite program has been covered by existing staff.

RESULTS

Although Whistler has not inventoried secondary suites, planning staff indicated that up until the past few years there were about 75 secondary suites created per year. As mentioned, Whistler has introduced a density bonus of up to 56 square metres.

The municipality believes suites have a positive impact on the liveability of neighbourhoods. In neighbourhoods where most of the homes are vacation homes and the owners are usually absent, having suites helps keep neighbourhoods alive in the off-peak times.

The municipality believes suites have a positive impact on the liveability of neighbourhoods. In neighbourhoods where most of the homes are vacation homes and the owners are usually absent, having suites helps keep neighbourhoods alive in the off-peak times.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the key strengths of the Whistler suite program is having a long history of suites being allowed.

The primary challenge is the escalating local real estate market. With construction costs well over $200 per square foot there is a lack of financial incentive to build suites. To address this challenge, the municipality is promoting the idea that there is a benefit to having somebody on the property as a caretaker, and is working with developers to encourage owners to create carriage houses.

An additional challenge is the use of secondary suites as tourist accommodation rather than rental housing. Neighbours sometimes bring this to the municipality's attention. Whistler's bylaw enforcement officer checks internet and newspaper advertising to identify tourist accommodation.

Whistler staff offer the following advice for other resort communities looking to encourage secondary suites as a form of affordable housing:

1. Don't assume the market is going to meet the demand. You have to be very pro-active.
2. Having resort employees live in the community benefits everybody. For example, hotel employees who live in the community may be better able to answer customer questions.
3. Monitor suite creation on an ongoing basis. Tracking the number of suites created over time is something Whistler realizes would have been worth doing.

TRANSFERABILITY

Elements of the Whistler model are relevant to other resort communities, particularly those with high housing costs. The use of density bonuses and covenants to promote provision of affordable rental housing for employees, and Whistler's strategies to prevent conversion of suites to tourist accommodations, may be useful elsewhere. The opportunity to have legal suites from the outset is clearly applicable to newly incorporating jurisdictions and to new developments.

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VILLAGE OF ANMORE

LOCAL CONTEXT

Anmore is a low-density residential suburb, within the GVRD. Incorporated in part to protect the semi-rural character of the area, it has a population of approximately 1,500. Being within Greater Vancouver, and having a minimum lot size of one acre, housing prices in Anmore are generally high.

MUNICIPAL RESPONSE

The Village of Anmore has always allowed secondary suites in detached homes, including units in accessory buildings. However, suites are not allowed in duplexes. The requirements for suites are:

- Up to one suite per lot;
- Minimum floor area of 42 square metres and maximum of 100 square metres;
- Separate entrance from principal unit.

Billing for most utilities is not an issue, as water is metered and Anmore does not have a sewer system. Billings for new recycling services will be double for residences with legal suites.

RESULTS

Of approximately 90-100 secondary suites in Anmore, an estimated 70% are legal. The illegal suites may not have septic fields approved, or may not meet the requirements.

LESSONS LEARNED

The benefits of permitting suites have included improved affordability for homeowners, better mix of housing types, + more diversified mix of residents in the community.

The primary strength of the Anmore model is permitting secondary suites since formation of the municipality. The benefits of permitting suites have included improved affordability for homeowners, a better mix of housing types, and a more diversified mix of residents in the community.

An ongoing challenge is that Anmore does not have a municipal sewage system. As a result, new suites in existing homes are required to add septic capacity. One of the challenges that the Village of Anmore may face in the future is dealing with creation of secondary suites in duplexes. The concern is that legal duplexes could become four-plexes. As of 2004 there were fifteen duplexes built or under construction.

TRANSFERABILITY

The Village of Anmore model is primarily relevant to newly incorporated municipalities. It may also be of interest to smaller, semi-rural jurisdictions that are just beginning to address the secondary suites issue.

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WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

BEST PRACTICES

Analysis of the case examples indicates four effective practices:

1. ***Consult with residents and stakeholder organizations.*** Secondary suites can be a highly contentious community issue. However, the experience of many jurisdictions suggests that listening to concerns, and finding ways to address them, helps to defuse strong feelings. In addition, community and stakeholder input can create a better program. The builders and developers interviewed for this guide indicated a keen interest in working with local governments to create secondary suite strategies. It is recommended that local governments consult with home builders associations and developers in their jurisdiction.
2. ***Use a consistent approach throughout the jurisdiction.*** Staff from several jurisdictions commented that one of the key strengths of their secondary suite program is consistency throughout the municipality. For example, if suites are allowed in all detached homes, it creates a sense of fairness and simplicity. A consistent approach is easier to understand.
3. ***Provide clear information materials.*** Information materials on secondary suites, such as fact sheets and guidelines, should clearly state the information needed by homeowners and other interested parties.
4. ***Focus efforts on creating legal suites for the future.*** Legalizing existing suites has proven extremely difficult. Most jurisdictions have had limited uptake on voluntary registration and upgrading. Proactive enforcement is costly and may result in significant loss of secondary suite stock.

Secondary suites can be a highly contentious community issue. However, the experience of many jurisdictions suggests that listening to concerns, and finding ways to address them, helps to defuse strong feelings.

On the other hand, there has been excellent uptake on the inclusion of new suites (or at least "suite-readiness") in new, detached housing. Much of the resulting rental housing stock may be higher-end than suites in older homes. Over the long term however, expanded supply of rental housing will contribute to affordability while maintaining health and safety standards.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Local government will increasingly have to address the issue of housing affordability, and more specifically, affordable rental options. Secondary suites are a viable market housing option with numerous benefits for communities. The experience of the eight communities profiled in this guide can help other municipalities mitigate barriers to successful implementation and develop their own secondary suite programs.

Successful programs will include strong public consultation and education to help alleviate the concerns of affected residents. In Vancouver there was significantly lower

As the demand for affordable rental housing continues to grow, limited investment in non-market housing, and increasing residential property values, creates the need for permissive policies on secondary suites. This should encourage the production of safe, legal and affordable rental housing.

attendance at public meetings regarding secondary suites once community consultation and education programs were implemented. As the demand for affordable rental housing continues to grow, limited investment in non-market housing, and increasing residential property values, creates the need for permissive policies on secondary suites to encourage the production of safe, legal and affordable rental housing.

The following practices are recommended for balancing the need for affordable rental housing with the need for equitable utility billings and protection of health and safety:

- Allow up to one secondary suite per single-family residential property;
- Create and apply alternative life safety standards for suites in pre-existing dwellings;
- Charge less than full utility rates (e.g. 50%) or recover on a usage basis, e.g. water meters;
- Avoid or minimize special fees and requirements, such as registration/inspection fees, rezoning fees, licensing for non-owner occupied properties.

The table below summarizes some of the primary objectives that local governments may have with respect to secondary suites, and strategies that may be effective in addressing these objectives.

Summary of Policy Objectives and Strategies

Objective	Strategies	Examples
Expand future stock of new, legal suites	Allow suites in single family residential properties	Village of Anmore, City of North Vancouver
	Encourage 'suite readiness' in new homes	City of Coquitlam
	Create design standards	City of New Westminster
Legalize existing suites, with upgrading to minimum health and safety standards	Create alternative building standards	City of Coquitlam (e.g., 6'2" ceilings for pre-2000 suites)
	Charge higher utility rates for unregistered suites	City of Coquitlam
Close suites with health and safety problems	Enforce decommissioning of suites that fail to comply	City of Abbotsford
Protect rental affordability in a resort community	Covenants to rent to staff only, with controlled rent	Resort Municipality of Whistler
	Prevent rental of suites as tourist accommodations	Resort Municipality of Whistler

The evidence-based research provided in this guide demonstrates that these recommended practices for secondary suite programs combine elements that balance the need for affordable rental housing with the need for community consultation, fairness, and protection of health and safety.

APPENDIX A:

HOW WE CREATED THIS GUIDE

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The development of this guide involved a collaborative, consultative approach. Collaboration in design of the research and in shaping the outline of the guide included:

- Dialogue with key individuals involved with secondary suite issues;
- Discussion with the project Advisory Committee.

The Secondary Suites Advisory Committee provided input and feedback at key stages. The Committee comprises a mix of representatives from local governments, the provincial government, Tenants Rights Action Coalition (TRAC), and SFU Community Trust (UniverCity). (Please see the Interview Participants section in Appendix C for a list of committee members.) Data gathering activities included:

- Document collection and review;
- Interviews with local government planning, building inspection, and bylaw enforcement staff;
- Interviews with suite owners and builders;
- Key interviews (e.g. BC Assessment, BC Real Estate Association, Canadian Home Builders Association).

Analysis included:

- Synthesis of findings from document review and interview data to provide a synopsis on each substantive topic (e.g. liability management);
- Consideration of each case in terms of criteria and indicators.

CRITERIA AND INDICATORS

The guide incorporated the experience of eight municipalities that have implemented secondary suite programs. The selection of these municipalities was based on preliminary application of the criteria listed in the following table.

	Criteria	Potential Indicators
1	Increased # of secondary suites - New suites - Closure of suites	Inventories of housing stock. # of building permit applications. Ratio of closures to legalized suites.
2	Legalization of suites	# of existing units legalized.
3	Affordability of suites	Change in average rental rates.
4	Community acceptance	Change in # of complaints.# of people attending public meetings and levels of acceptance recorded.
5	Demonstrated political will	Council decisions that show intent to protect and expand secondary suite stock.

APPENDIX B:

EXISTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT POWERS FOR REGULATING SECONDARY SUITES

INTRODUCTION

Local governments have a wide range of powers to regulate secondary suites and to address community concerns about the impact of secondary suites in detached housing neighbourhoods.

In 1996, the provincial government published "Secondary Suites Progress Report: Existing Local Government Powers for Managing Secondary Suites" in response to requests for assistance in planning and regulating secondary suites. This appendix is an updated version of the 1996 report.

The *Local Government Act* and the *Community Charter* have replaced the *Municipal Act* since the Progress Report was completed. Most of the powers to plan and regulate secondary suites remain unchanged within the *Local Government Act*. However, the *Community Charter* now provides broader powers to regulate, prohibit and impose requirements. Another example is broadened powers to set fees, as set out in Section 194 (1). The *Community Charter* came into force on January 1, 2004.

Existing local government secondary suite planning and regulatory authorities are discussed under five headings: planning policies; regulations; financial powers; penalties and enforcement; and additional powers.

PLANNING POLICIES

Several local governments have identified secondary suites as a valuable component of affordable housing stock and have developed policies that encourage their provision. Local governments can establish secondary suite policies in Official Community Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and other planning documents. The *Local Government Act* requires a local government to include policies on affordable housing, rental housing and special needs housing in their Official Community Plan. A policy on secondary suites would help meet these requirements.

REGULATIONS

Local government can use a variety of bylaws and regulations to manage secondary suites.

Through the existing zoning provisions of the Local Government Act, (S.903) local governments can regulate land use, density, site and size, and location of uses on the land and within the structures.

Land Use Designation. Through the existing zoning provisions of the *Local Government Act*, (S.903) local governments can regulate land use, density, site and size, and location of uses on the land and within the structures. This provision includes secondary suites.

Zoning bylaws can establish where suites may exist and under what conditions. Although conditions vary considerably from one community to another, some of the most common conditions include:

- limit of one suite per lot;
- provisions respecting size of the suite (gross floor area, size relative to primary dwelling, minimum lot size);
- specifying the geographic areas where suites are, or are not acceptable;
- provisions respecting parking; and,
- not permitting suites where other uses are being carried on in the house such as a home-based business, day care, or group home.

Density Bonuses. Section 904(1) of the *Local Government Act* allows zoning bylaws to establish different density regulations for a zone and to establish conditions that would entitle an owner to a higher density. Subsection (2) specifies what type of conditions may be included. Within subsection (2) are conditions relating to amenities, conditions relating to the provisions of affordable and special needs housing and a condition that the owner enter into an Housing Agreement.

This authority makes it possible for a municipality to structure a zoning bylaw to offer additional density if a secondary suite is provided. The additional density (the floor area of the suite) could be excluded from the floor area calculations. In new developments, additional density could be available for purpose-built secondary suites.

Housing Agreements. Section 905 of the *Local Government Act* enables local governments to enter into agreements with property owners. These agreements can include conditions relating to the form of tenure and the availability of housing units to classes of persons identified in the agreement or bylaw. This section of the Act also allows conditions relating to the administration and management of the housing units and rents that may be charged. Although there is no specific authority for residency requirements, or owner occupancy requirements for secondary suites, there appears to be broad enough authority in the *Local Government Act* through this section to apply such conditions to secondary suites.

Local governments have the ability to establish land use through a covenant.

Covenants. Local governments have the ability to establish land use through a covenant. A covenant that may be registered under section 219 of the *Land Title Act* may be of a negative or positive nature and may include provisions concerning the use of land; the use of a building on, or to be erected on, land; building on or the subdivision of the land; and amenities. Therefore, a local government could agree, for example, with one or a number of property owners to permit secondary suites by covenant.

Development Permits. Section 919.1 and section 920 of the *Local Government Act* outline local government authority for development permits. Community plans may designate areas for several purposes, including the establishment of objectives and the provision of guidelines for the form and character of intensive residential development (919.1(e)), as well as commercial, industrial or multi-family residential development (919.1(f)).[10] However, section 920 (9) specifies that where land has been designated under section 919 (f), the character of development and landscaping can only be addressed in general terms. The ability to regulate detailed landscaping or exterior design and finishing of buildings and structures is not provided for to the extent many municipalities want in order to regulate secondary suites.

Several local governments consider homes with secondary suites to be a two-family dwelling or 'duplex'. In some legal opinions, a duplex fits into the multi-family residential development category, and therefore development permits can be used to require design and landscaping details. However, other legal opinions suggest duplexes are not multi-family residential developments.

Several local governments consider homes with secondary suites to be a two-family dwelling or 'duplex'. In some legal opinions, a duplex fits into the multi-family residential development category. Therefore development permits can be used to require design and landscaping details.

Building Code. The primary tool for regulating physical conditions of residential premises is the BC Building Code. The building code was amended in 1995 to add a section that applies specifically to secondary suites. In practice, the amendment means ceiling heights can be lower than for other housing; sound control between dwelling units is not mandatory; handrails, exterior landings and exits can be similar to those required in a house and other similar amendments (for window location, corridor widths, etc.) which set a reasonable standard that facilitates the development of secondary suites. The amendments also provide safe and economical alternatives to existing fire safety provisions in the building code.

In the revised code, a suite is defined as a smaller dwelling unit located within a house designed for single-family occupancy. Buildings other than houses (such as apartments) cannot have secondary suites. A house can have only one secondary suite and it cannot be strata titled. Secondary suites must occupy less than 40 per cent of the habitable floor space of the house, to a maximum area of 90 square metres (968 sq. ft.).

Licensing. Section 15 of the *Community Charter* provides broad licensing and standards authority. Although section 15 provides broad licensing powers, section 60 clarifies that a business licence may not be unreasonably refused. This is different from the former section 655 of the *Local Government Act*, which stated that a business license can not be required of the owner of an owner-occupied property containing up to two secondary suites. Section 59 of the Charter provides authority for a municipality, by bylaw, to require operators of premises in which rooms or suites are let for living purposes to maintain a register of persons living there.

[10] Note that single, detached homes and two-unit (duplex) housing are not generally considered multi-family.

Landscaping. Under section 909 in the *Local Government Act*, local governments may by bylaw require, set standards for and regulate the provision of screening or landscaping to mask or separate uses.

Maintenance of Property. Since 1994, local governments have had the authority to establish standards of maintenance bylaws for rental accommodation. Sections 8(3)(g) and 63 of the Community Charter authorize a council for reasons of health, safety and protection of persons and property, to require the maintenance of residential premises as defined in the *Residential Tenancy Act*.

With sections 8(3)(h) and 64 of the *Community Charter* (Nuisances and Disturbances), municipal councils may prohibit owners or occupiers of real property from allowing their property to become or remain unsightly. In order to remedy unsightliness, council may require owners or occupiers to remove refuse, garbage or other material that is noxious, offensive or unwholesome and deal with other unsanitary or unsightly conditions on their property. If, after a certain amount of time, the owner fails to comply, the municipality may remove the refuse and charge the costs to the owner's property taxes.

In addition, the *Local Government Act* provides other powers for regulating the condition of rental properties that have heritage significance. There are also provisions under the *Health Act* and *Fire Services Act* that allow municipalities to regulate specific aspects of rental accommodation.

FINANCIAL POWERS

The Community Charter enables local governments to charge a secondary suite administrative fee.

Local governments have two tools to ensure that homeowners with secondary suites are paying their fair share of municipal services. In addition, the Community Charter enables local governments to charge a secondary suite administrative fee.

Administrative Fees. Section 194 of the *Community Charter* allows an annual administrative fee charged to a homeowner to offset costs related to a secondary suites program.

User Fees. Local governments have broad authority through the section 194 of the *Community Charter* to levy user charges in exchange for providing a specific service to a property, such as water supply and garbage collection.

Property Taxes. In situations where a suite has been added to an existing home, the property is reassessed for property tax purposes by the BC Assessment Authority. The investment in a suite almost always translates into an increase in the market value assessment of the property, leading to a likely increase in municipal, regional and school taxes.

Tax Exemptions. Section 226 of the Community Charter refers to tax exemptions for revitalization areas. If an area is identified in the OCP or annual financial plan as

a revitalization area, a revitalization tax exemption for up to five years plus one five-year extension (total of ten years) can be given to a property for "construction of a new improvement or alteration of an existing improvement". This could be applied to creation of a secondary suite in any home in a revitalization area as long as the suite constituted either a new improvement or an alteration of an existing improvement.

PENALTIES AND ENFORCEMENT POWERS

There are a number of penalties that can be imposed or enforcement tools that a municipality may use to address situations where a secondary suite property owner fails to comply with its bylaws and regulations.

The Offence Act. Municipalities have the ability to prosecute the property owner in court for contravening a bylaw. The maximum penalty currently allowed under the *Offence Act* is $2000. Some municipalities feel this is not a very efficient use of staff time and resources, and prefer other methods.

Municipal Tickets. As an alternative to seeking a summary conviction and penalties under the *Offence Act*, the municipality may want to consider implementing a "Municipal Ticket Information Authorization Bylaw" and deal with offences to its bylaws by ticketing. The authority to use ticketing as a means of enforcing bylaws and the fines that can be charged are found in section 264 of the *Community Charter*, and the Municipal Regulation 352/89 sets out the categories of bylaws for which tickets can be issued, such as zoning, business licensing and landscape screening.

Notice on Title. A council or board may also, by resolution, decide to file a notice in the land titles office against the title of a property that does not comply with the building bylaw and any other laws related to the construction or safety of buildings. This notice serves as a warning to future purchasers of the property and may serve as an immediate incentive to the current owner to comply. The process that local government must follow is detailed in section 57 of the *Community Charter*.

Local governments have used this to ensure that when new owners review the land title, they are made aware that the structure is in contravention of a bylaw or regulation. In the case of a secondary suite, the notice would state the suite does not conform to building code standards.

By-law Contravention Notice. Sections 72-80 of the *Community Charter* enable local government, by bylaw, to require that a building be brought up to a standard specified in a bylaw where the building contravenes a bylaw. If this part of the Act is being used, the council must provide 30 days written notice to the owner, tenant or occupier of the real property. The owner, tenant or occupier of the real property has 14 days to ask council to reconsider its decision. If a required action is not taken, section 80 authorizes council

to sell the property if compliance is not achieved and sections 17 and 258 provide the authority to recover the expenses, costs and interest incurred by a municipality if they take remedial action by adding them to municipal taxes payable on that property.

CONCLUSION

Local governments have a wide range of powers under existing legislation to establish and regulate secondary suites. These powers can address many community concerns about the impact of secondary suites on single-family home neighbourhoods.

Local governments have a wide range of powers under existing legislation to establish and regulate secondary suites and to address many community concerns about the impact of secondary suites on single-family home neighbourhoods.

However, local government does not appear to have clear authority to require detailed landscaping and design conditions for single-family and two-family dwellings unless they are part of an intensive residential development, or clear authority to require owner occupancy or other residency requirements in houses with secondary suites.

APPENDIX C:

REFERENCES AND INFORMATION RESOURCES

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Residential Intensification Case Studies: Municipal Initiatives, CMHC Research Highlights, January 2004.

Review of Municipal Secondary Suite Policies in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, Greater Vancouver Regional District, March 2002.

Secondary Suites – Information Package, Secondary Suite Health and Safety Committee of Lower Vancouver Island, prepared by Colleen Kasting, Burnside Gorge Community Centre, October 2000.

INFORMATION RESOURCES ON SPECIFIC TOPICS

Communication Materials

"Building for a Secondary Suite", City of North Vancouver.
"Guide to Secondary Suites Zoning Regulations", City of New Westminster.
"Information for Residential Suites", City of Nelson.
"Public Information Regarding the New Employee Housing Initiatives in Residential Areas", Resort Municipality of Whistler.
"Secondary Suites, A General Guide", City of New Westminster.

Community Acceptance

How the District of North Vancouver Built Community Acceptance for the Legalization of Secondary Suites in Single Family Neighbourhoods, Prepared for Federation of Canadian Municipalities, January 1999.

Toward More Inclusive Neighbourhoods, Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services. http://www.mcaws.gov.bc.ca/housing/NEIGHBOUR/index.htm#toc

Design Standards

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Flex-Units

See "Barriers and Solutions" report (can be downloaded – see link under "References")

Contact SFU Community Trust http://www.univercity.ca

See CMHC case study, *The Convertible House – Vancouver BC.* http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/imquaf/afho/afadv/cohode/deflho/case2.cfm

Housing Agreements for Employee Housing

"Standard Housing Agreement, 219 Covenant, and Rent Charge and Indemnity for Auxiliary Units" (form), Resort Municipality of Whistler. http://www.whistlerhousing.ca/legal.htm

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Advisory Committee

The Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services convened a Secondary Suites Advisory Committee to provide advice and direction in the creation of this guide. The following seven people served on the Committee:

- Tom Durning, Tenants Rights Action Coalition (TRAC)
- Lois-Leah Goodwin, Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services
- Beverly Grieve, Greater Vancouver Regional District
- Lynn Guilbault, City of Coquitlam
- Chris Hartman, SFU Community Trust
- Keith Laxton, Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services
- Judy McLeod, City of Surrey
- Cathy McNamara, District of Tofino
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The following people provided input to this guide through participation in interviews:

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- Trish Deinel, City of Nelson
- Theresa Eichler, City of Kelowna
- David Guiney, City of New Westminster
- Duane Jackson, Whistler-based developer, architect, and builder
- Cheryl Kathler, City of North Vancouver
- Thor Kuhlmann, (formerly) City of New Westminster
- Inder Litt, City of Abbotsford
- John Lynch, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- Bob MacPherson, Resort Municipality of Whistler
- Drew Meredith, Whistler Real Estate Company
- Rod Nadeau, Innovation Building Group; Canadian Home Builders Association, Sea to Sky Chapter
- Stephen Olmstead, British Columbia Real Estate Association
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- John Southam, City of Nelson
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- Zina Weston, BC Assessment Authority
- Tony Wilson, City of North Vancouver

Readers Group

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- Mark Bostwick, District of North Vancouver
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